The Bay State Patriot





Massachusetts Department Of Veterans' Services



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JudyAnn Bigby, M.D. Secretary, EOHHS

Thomas G. Kelley Secretary, DVS

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From Secretary Kelley

I hope you all had a happy holiday season. This past year, marked the beginning of some great new programs for Massachusetts veterans, including the SAVE (Statewide Advocacy for Veterans Empowerment) Program, MassHousing's "A Home for the Brave", the DPH Smoking Cessation program for veterans and families, the work of the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services Subcommittees, and the Legislature's establishment of the Commission on Hidden Wounds of War. The success of these programs, along with so many others, is due to the hard working individuals throughout the Commonwealth who have dedicated themselves to taking care of our veterans.

As a nation, we are facing tough economic times ahead. It is important that now, more than ever, we remain sensitive to the needs of Massachusetts veterans and their families. Those who may have never dreamed of ever asking for assistance will now need the continued dedication, support, and assistance from all of us, as staff and members of the community. I have the utmost faith in the staff here at the Department of Veterans' Services, the Veterans' Service Officers, and all of the Veterans' Service Organizations to assure that our veterans are receiving the benefits and services they have earned and may need.

We should all take great pride in the reputation that

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www.mass.gov/veterans

Massachusetts has earned in offering the most comprehensive benefits and services to its veterans and their families. It is necessary that during this time when the country and our veterans are in great need that we continue to offer the same great assistance and enduring support.

Thank you.

Thomas a Mella

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Undersecretary Coleman Nee attends the Korean Veterans of America CHAPTER #299 holiday party in West Roxbury with KWVA National Director..



Fuel Assistance For The Needy

LIHEAP or Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is a program designed to help those in need with their home heating during the winter months. The amount of assistance is based on your household's gross income, housing status and heating costs. Benefits range from \$450.00-\$1305.00 for the 2008-2009 heating year. If you are in subsidized housing you may be eligible for a reduced benefit. If you are renting you may be eligible if your heat is included in the rent. These benefits may also cover weatherization services, and heating system repairs. There are a number of community agencies where applications can be taken (see the list on the web at http://app1.ocd.state.ma.us/fuel/) or call toll free to the Massachusetts Heat Line at 1-800-632-8175. This may also qualify you for additional discounts on other utilities which can be explained by your assisting agency.

If you are not eligible for LIHEAP you maybe eligible for the Good Neighbor Energy Fund if you household's gross income is between 200% and 275% of the federal poverty guidelines. The maximum benefit you will receive is \$275.00 per household per heating season. If you are still in need of winter heating assistance you could contact Citizen Energy Corporation. There are no strict income guidelines for this program. You can call 1-877-563-4645 (1-877-JOE-4-OIL) and you can receive a voucher for a one-time delivery of 100 gallons of heating oil, kerosene or natural gas. If you are a veteran or dependent of a veteran and have applied for and used up the amounts available through the above-mentioned programs, please see your Veterans' Service Officer for additional assistance.

New Transition House For Women Veterans

On October 22, 2008, the Women Veterans Transition House opened in New Bedford. Senator Mark Montigny and Scott Lang, Mayor of the City of New Bedford, were present for the dedication and ribboncutting ceremony. The keynote address was delivered by Commander Mary Beth O'Sullivan USN (Ret.). She is the Outreach Advisor and recruiter for Veterans Upward Bound at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and a driving force behind the Boston Stand Down which provide direct services to homeless veterans. This new transition house is home to ten women veterans who are dealing with homelessness, alcohol and drug abuse recovery. Each resident can reside at the Transition House for a maximum of two years. Throughout that time she will partake in individual and group counseling to learn skills such as anger management, life skills, art as therapy, and preventing domestic violence, with the goal of developing the tools needed for successful independent living. 'We are extremely proud to bring this type of program, which is

unique to the eastern half of our Commonwealth, to New Bedford," states James A. Reid, Executive Director. The Women Veterans Transition House is operated by Southeastern. Mass. Veterans Housing Program, Inc. and is located at 98 Arnold Street in New Bedford. Margaret Guzman, Program Director can be reached at 508-717-8710 for more information.

By Panayiota Bertzikis, Assistant, Women Veterans' Network

VA Assisting Veterans with Health Care Costs

WASHINGTON (Jan. 6, 2009) -- For veterans struggling financially due to a job loss or decreased income, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers an assortment of programs that can relieve the costs of health care or provide care at no cost.

"With the downturn in the economy, VA recognizes that many veterans will feel the effects," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "Therefore, it is important that eligible veterans learn of the many ways VA has to help them afford the health care they have earned."

Veterans whose previous income was ruled too high for VA health care may be able to enter the VA system based upon a hardship if their current year's income is projected to fall below federal income thresholds due to a job loss, separation from service or some other financial setback.

Veterans determined eligible due to hardship can avoid co-pays applied to higher-income veterans. Qualifying veterans may be eligible for enrollment and receive health care at no cost.

Also eligible for no-cost VA care are most veterans who recently returned from a combat zone. They are entitled to five years of free VA care. The five-year "clock" begins with their discharge from the military, not their departure from the combat zone.

Each VA medical center across the country has an enrollment coordinator available to provide veterans information about these programs.

Veterans may also contact VA's Health Benefits Service Center at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) or visit the VA health eligibility website at www.va.gov/healtheligibility.

VA News Release

From the S.A.V.E. Team

On behalf of the SAVE team I would like to extend to all of our Commonwealth Veterans wishes for a prosperous and peaceful new year. I would also like to include with this New Year's greeting our sincerest gratitude for the service you may have given to our country or your current service; and even with this New Year's fiscal turbulence, the mission of helping the Commonwealth's veterans obtain the benefits they have earned, remains a primary function and honored duty of the Department of Veterans' Service the SAVE program

ADVOCACY This February 11th, the SAVE program will be celebrating its one year anniversary and I would like to take this opportunity to explain an exciting VETERANS' component of the SAVE program: its training and education program. As some of you may or may not know, the emotional impact of conflict can have lasting EMPOWERMENT effects on a person's ability to reach their full potential, within this era of The Global War on Terrorism, we as a country are more aware of this than ever. Despite this greater awareness though, many in the non-veteran community are not aware of some of the transitional issues veterans may experience upon their return to civilian life. These areas where awareness may be lacking are the main focus of the SAVE education and training program. They include municipal institutions such as police and fire departments, institutes of higher learning and state government. Two trainings which we are very excited about are the training of legislative aids at the State House, and training for the Massachusetts State Police S.E.R.T. officers.

By Sam Hamm - SAVE team member

Wounded Warrior Programs



On Friday, December 12th, DVS received a visit from Colonel Frank, USMC Wounded Warrior Liaison to the Veterans Administration and Colonel Boyle, Regimental Commander of the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Program. The purpose of the visit was to learn about Massachusetts' outreach programs at the federal and state levels and to discuss outreach efforts to wounded Marines in Massachusetts.

Secretary Kelley presented an overview of the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services and all the programs and benefits for veterans in Massachusetts. James Crosby provided information about the SAVE Team and

how they interact with wounded warriors getting them assistance and working with the VSOs in their communities to access their benefits. MAJ David Hencke, Deployment Cycle Support Chief of the Operation Total Warrior Program discussed the DOD mandated seminars that the National Guard presents to returning veterans and their families following deployment that address adjustment issues and services. Michael Lawson, Director of VA Boston gave the group a tour of the spinal cord injury center as well as the physical therapy center. The team met with two Marine Veterans who shared their experiences and discussed how to improve in terms of care and outreach. The team concluded their visit with Senator Thomas McGee, who discussed future legislative initiatives underway for veterans in Massachusetts. There was a good exchange of information for all participants. For more information on wounded warrior programs for all services, visit www.warriorcare.mil

By Cheryl Lussier Poppe Director, Veterans Programs and Services

State Veterans' Cemeteries News

The Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) is in the process of forming a partnership with the Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association (MFDA) and the Missing in America Project (MIAP) to help identify and inter unclaimed cremains of eligible veterans and their dependents.

The Department of Veterans' Services has established a protocol that was designed to assist MFDA with turning remains over to DVS so that we can provide a dignified and honorable service for both the veteran and their eligible dependents.

We hope to have this program underway in February 2009

By Bill Walls, Director

Are the Charities Calling You for A Donations?

We receive many calls during the year from veterans' and their family members asking us if a particular charity is legitimate or not. Our first response is to refer the caller to the Attorney General's office at 617-727-2200. The phone answers with a voice recognition system and your response would be "Public Charities". You are then provided numerical prompts, select #3 and then #2, you will then be able to speak to a person and ask about the charity you are concerned about. The records are checked instantly and you are told if the charity is in compliance or not.

Also, be aware that anybody asking that you leave a check in your mailbox, or taped to the door, or you are told that somebody will be by to pick up your donation, be wary... this is not the way a legitimate charity operates. If you get a phone call soliciting a contribution on behalf of the veterans of Massachusetts, ask that they send you information about their charity in the mail. Do not give out any personal information and call the Attorney General's Office to verify their legitimacy.

Excerpts from the Veterans' Administration letter outlining the New GI Bill

Basic eligibility requirements for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, also known as Chapter 33 are; active duty service performed after September 10, 2001, must have at least 90 aggregate days of active duty, unless they sustained a service-connected disability (only 30 days continuous service are required under service-connected circumstances).

Basic Benefits

The maximum basic benefit provides the following: Cost of tuition and fees, not to exceed the most expensive in-state undergraduate tuition at a public institution of higher learning in the state you are attending school; (list can be found on the VA website). Monthly housing allowance equal to the basic allowance for housing payable to an E-5 with dependents, in the same zip code as the school; and yearly books and supplies stipend of up to \$1000 per year. To receive the maximum basic benefit you must have completed 36 months of active duty. Less than 36 months will be based on a schedule of benefits which can be found on the VA website www.gibill.va.gov.

The Yellow Ribbon Program

The Yellow Ribbon Program provision of the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows institutions to enter into an agreement with VA to fund tuition costs above the highest in-state undergraduate tuition rate. VA will match each additional dollar that an institution of higher learning (IHL) contributes toward an eligible student's tuition costs, up to 50 percent of the difference between the tuition and fees covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and the total cost of tuition and fees. Only individuals entitled to the

maximum benefit rate (based on service requirements) may receive this funding. IHLs will offer this additional benefit to eligible individuals on a first come, first served basis. Detailed information regarding the Yellow Ribbon Program, including a list of participating Yellow Ribbon institutions will be posted on our website.

Applications are not being accepted at this time but it is estimated that applications may begin sometime in May, 2009. Please check the VA website for updated information.

Veterans' Smoking Cessation Project

COURAGE. COMMITMENT. THE WILL TO SURVIVE.

You have what it takes to quit smoking.

Veterans, get FREE nicotine patches to help you quit for good!

1-800-Try-To-Stop (1-800-879-8678) Fight4YourLife. Quit now.





On November 17, 2008 The Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) announced a nicotine patch giveaway for Massachusetts veterans, their family members, and survivors who want to quit smoking. Massachusetts veterans and their family members who call the Massachusetts Smokers Helpline will receive a free four-week supply of nicotine patches valued at \$100

retail, along with informational resources on the benefits of quitting smoking, and tips on how to stop. Program participants will also receive free telephone support.

Massachusetts veterans smoke at a higher rate than the general adult population: 24% as opposed to 18%, when adjusted for age (based on figures from 2005-07). Studies show that using medications such as the nicotine patch combined with support triples your chances of quitting smoking for good.

The quit line had received over 1,000 calls from veterans and their families throughout the Commonwealth. For more information on the program, please call 1 - 800 - Try-To-Stop (1-800 879 8678) or visit www.makesmokinghistory.org/veterans . The Veterans' Quit Smoking program will run through June 30, 2009.

The Department of Veterans' Services publication Veterans' Laws and Benefits is a compilation of resources regarding state benefits in the areas of education, employment, medical assistance, and motor vehicles and property taxes. The booklet is available online and can be accessed at the Secretary of State website at the following link http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cis/eisvet/vet/dx.htm

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